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BARRIERS TO CHANGE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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THREE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SLOW CHANGE FACILITY OF EDUCATION ARE EXAMINED. (1) THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM LACKS A PROFESSIONAL INNOVATOR. COUNTY AND STATE LEVELS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION LARGELY CONFINE THEIR ROLE TO REGULATION AND NEGLECT THE ADVOCATION OF CHANGE. ON THE LOCAL LEVEL, THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT IS EXPECTED TO OPERATE BOTH AS A CENTRAL PART OF HIS UNIT AND AS THAT UNIT'S AGENT OF CHANGE. (2) INADEQUATE RESEARCH, EXPERIMENTATION, AND DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS RESULT IN A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT NEW EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES. THIS DEFICIENCY MAY BE RECTIFIED IN THE FUTURE BY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FEDERALLY FUNDED EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT, AND DISSEMINATION CENTERS AT MAJOR UNIVERSITIES. (3) PUBLIC SCHOOLS, SINCE THEY PROVIDE AN INDISPENSABLE SERVICE, ARE PROTECTED, CARED FOR, AND ASSURED OF CONTINUED EXISTENCE IN THE MANNER OF A "DOMESTICATED" ANIMAL. CONSEQUENTLY, THEY EXPERIENCE LITTLE NEED FOR OR INTEREST IN CHANGE. EARLIER RESEARCH FINDINGS BY THE LATE PAUL MORT SUGGESTED THAT INNOVATIONS ARISE DIRECTLY IN PROPORTION TO PER-CHILD EXPENDITURE IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. NEW DATA, HOWEVER, REJECT ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADOPTION OF EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS AND EXPENDITURE PER CHILD, STRESSING RATHER THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN THE INNOVATING PROCESS. THE COMPLETE DOCUMENT, "CHANGE PROCESSES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS," IS AVAILABLE FROM THE CENTER FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, EUGENE, OREGON 97403, FOR $2.00. (SS)

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Change Processes in the Public Schools

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Change Processes in the Public Schools

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Foreword

Organizations have careers in much the same sense that individuals have careers. In the tracing out of organizational careers, a number of changes can always be detected, even among the seemingly most stable organizations.

Change in organizations comes about in many ways. Some changes occur with the size of the organization and some changes occur with the maturation process. Also, organizational change results, sometimes dramatically but most often not, from the succession of people through key offices. Similarly, a kind of evolutionary change in organizations can be seen as they adapt to forces within or conditions of their environments. To some extent, changes of this order can be called "organizational drift" because they frequently go unnoticed by those who direct the affairs of an organization. The effect of these rather gradual changes are almost imperceptibly viewed over a short time span but sometimes loom large when the overall career of the organization is considered.

In addition to organizational change that might be characterized as drift, change comes about in organizations by design or deliberate plan. Being seemingly "self" conscious about ends to be achieved and means of achieving ends, organizations strive for survival, if not perfection, and seem constantly to be proposing and carrying out change plans. It is this latter type of change, *planned change*, which is treated in this publication.

This publication is a report of a seminar conducted with public school officials by the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration at the University of Oregon. The seminar, considered a pilot venture, had as its main objective the enhancement of the school officials' understanding of the planned change processes and of their skills in carrying out planned change. In formulating the design of the seminar we were aided by members of the Committee on Inservice Education of the Oregon Association of Schoo! Administrators. Some changes in the order and nature of events were made while the seminar was in progress; these changes resulted from the almost continuous conversation with the consultants and other interested persons on the question, "How are things going?"

The seminar, held in Portland, Oregon in October, 1964, revolved

around two major elements: (1) small group discussions of papers prepared for the seminar by four consulting social scientists, and (2) what were termed "clinic sessions." These sessions brought the school officials and the social scientists together in small groups where attention was given to specific change problems that had been, and were being encountered by the school officials. In advance of the clinic sessions, the school officials prepared memoranda of their specific problems.

All of the events of the seminar are not reported here, nor does the order of the contents of this publication follow the order of the seminar itself.[1]

The publication includes three of the four papers prepared for the seminar by the consulting social scientists—those by Matthew B. Miles, Art Gallaher, Jr., and Everett M. Rogers. Unfortunately we were unable to secure publication rights to the paper by James Q. Wilson and consequently his work does not appear here. The papers by Richard O. Carlson and Roland J. Pellegrin, although they were read during the seminar, were not part of the grist for the mill in the clinic and discussion sessions. It will be noted that the papers of these latter two contributors present different perspectives on planned change from those contained in the papers by the consultants and in the summaries of the group discussions.

The final section of this publication is a summary of the seminar itself which was made by Donald E. Tope at its concluding session.

Some financial aid for the seminar was provided by the National Institute of Mental Health of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Our indebtedness extends also to the University Council for Educational Administration for the aid which was provided through its Executive Director, Jack Culbertson. Although they are unnamed here, many persons contributed a variety of talents to the task of the seminar and their efforts are gratefully acknowledged.

RICHARD O. CARLSON
KEITH GOLDHAMMER
Seminar Coordinators

February, 1965
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, Eugene, Oregon

[1] Although absent from this publication, a discussion of *The Jackson County Story* was included in the seminar. This case study exists in published form and may be obtained from the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon. (*The Jackson County Story, A Case Study*, by Keith Goldhammer and Frank Farner. University of Oregon, Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, 1964.)

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1

Barriers to Change in Public Schools

By
RICHARD O. CARLSON

EA 000 714

Barriers to Change in Public Schools

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University of Oregon

A GOOD MANY people, reflecting on our times, suggest that we are in the advanced stages of a revolution in education. Some of them are even prepared to argue the point, and there is considerable evidence to support their case. There are, for example, at least ten national projects in science, eleven in mathematics, one in English, two in foreign languages and four in social sciences that are currently preparing curriculum materials and testing them in the schools. The federal government has given considerable financial support to this so-called revolution in education. Over 12 million dollars has been disbursed by the Cooperative Research Branch of the U.S. Office of Education since 1956 for research on the improvement of education. This, of course, represents a very small amount in comparison to the support for the improvement of education which has been provided by the National Science Foundation and Title III of the National Defense Education Act.

In spite of all of the current activity, it seems fair to say that there is quite widespread pessimism about the ability of public schools to make rapid and adequate adaptation to our fast changing times.

I am sure you have heard many times Paul Mort's fully publicized finding that it takes 50 years for the complete diffusion of an educational innovation which is destined to be fully accepted. I am sure, too, that you are well aware of the generalization that public educational institutions are painfully slow to change. You have, no doubt, marveled, as I have, at the tremendous change facility of other sections of our work world such as agriculture and medicine. Evidence of the ability of these enterprises to change is all around us and constantly forces its way to our attention.

Why is this the case? Why are educational systems reputed to be slow to change and medicine and agriculture quick to change? Could it be that there exists a greater need to change practices in medicine and farming than there is need to change educational practices? Is the practice of education so advanced and the practice of medicine and farming so primitive as to explain the diverse rates of adaptability? I think not.

Three Barriers to Change

1. The Absence of a Change Agent

Part of the explanation of the slow rate of change in public schools, according to many students of organizational change, lies with the absence of an institutionalized change agent position in public education. A *change agent*, for the purposes of my remarks, can be defined as a person who attempts to influence the adoption decisions in a direction he feels is desirable. He is a professional who has as his major function the advocacy and introduction of innovations into practice.

The county extension agent is well recognized as a change agent as far as farming practices are concerned. But who is it that performs a similar role for educational practice? What office in public education as we know it has responsibility for the advocacy of change? Does such a function rest in the apparatus of state departments of education? Does it rest in the office of the county school superintendent? The answer to these questions seems clearly to be no. By and large, county and state levels of public education take as their major function one of regulation.

If the change agent role is not imbedded in county or state levels of public education, then perhaps it lies in the local school district unit. It would seem difficult to make a case that local school districts have developed positions wherein the superintendent takes as his major function the advocacy of change.

It seems easy to conclude that the change agent counterpart of the county extension agent has no office in our public school enterprise. And, as has been indicated, many attribute the slowness of change in educational practices to the absence of a change agent.

Let us assume, as seems reasonable to me, that by default of others, the change advocate role must be taken by the local school system through the office of the superintendent. This would seem to be not only a fair assumption, but, in the marked instances of rapidly adapting school districts, to be a fair description of reality.

Right away this makes obvious a difficulty: whereas the change agent prototype of the county extension agent operates outside of and free from the farm unit he is attempting to change, the school superintendent as a change agent is a central part of the unit he must take as his change objective. Being in and of the organization, the function of change advocacy for the school superintendent is difficult because he frequently must prescribe the change of his own practices.

In the area of providing public schools with a change advocate, the state of New York must be seen as a leader. During the last few years, through the Commission of Education in New York, a series of studies have been conducted aimed at the development of a plan for "improving the process of educational change in the elementary and secondary schools of the state." The plan for managing change that these

studies have developed is worth your attention and can be found in a monograph titled "Organizing New York State for Educational Change," which is published by the New York State Department of Education. In essence, the plan suggests that in order to deal effectively with the problem of change in school practices, three distinct and separate units must be established under the control of the Commissioner of Education of New York. One unit is a design unit where ideas are generated. The second unit has the task of evaluating the ideas flowing from the design unit. The third separate unit has as its function the development and dissemination of the practices which emanate from the other two agencies. The extent to which this plan is successful in improving the process of educational change in the schools of New York is, of course, still to be seen. Nevertheless, it is very encouraging to see the human talent and effort that is involved in the undertaking. And it is clear that the problem of establishing a viable change advocacy function among the many levels in our system of education is one of extreme importance and one for which we should recruit our best minds.

2. A Weak Knowledge Base

In addition to the lack of a change agent, schools are also handicapped in change activities by the weakness of the knowledge base about new educational practices. This is apparent when one contrasts the knowledge base about innovations which is available to the school superintendent with that which is available to the county extension agent. As you know, the county extension agent is backed by very extensive and practiced research, experiment, and devolpment operations. He is in a much more favored position than is the school superintendent to judge the merits of the innovations he attempts to have adopted, and to demonstrate these merits to the acceptors. It is rare indeed when an educational innovation is backed by solid research. It is even rarer to find an educational innovation which has been fully developed and subjected to careful trial and experimentation. Thus, the school superintendent as a change agent must ordinarily do not only the work of the county extension agent but also the work of the agricultural experimental station. This is a job of large dimensions. But, as you know from first hand experience, it is a job which is very exciting and satisfying.

The future may be brighter on this point: the school administrator may be relieved of some of the burdens of being both a county extension agent and an agricultural experimental station. The federal government has within the last year established four large educational research and development centers, (at the Universities of Oregon, Pittsburgh, and Wisconsin, and at Harvard) and more centers will be established in the future.

These centers are charged with research, development and dissemination responsibilities and in this sense can be seen as emulating the

U.S. agricultural experimental stations. These centers have high potential and, given time to get into full operation, should have a large influence on public education. They should give school administrators a knowledge base about educational practices that is as firm as that from which the county extension agent operates.

3. *"Domestication" of Public Schools*

To the list of factors which hinder change activities in public schools, a list which so far in my remarks includes the lack of a change agent and a weak knowledge base about innovations, let me add a third factor. This third factor has to do with organizational characteristics of schools and specifically with the relationship between the school as an organization and its clients.

When we talk about service organizations, those organizations which provide a self-improvement or rehabilitation function to clients which the organizations must motivate, it is clear that some of these organizations have the power or exercise the right to select its clients. Other service organizations, of which the school is one, cannot select their clients.

It is also obvious that clients are free to accept or reject the services provided by some service organizations but with some service organizations, the clients are *not* free to accept or reject the service—the clients of these organizations must accept the service. The school is one organization in the latter category.

Thus, some service organizations operate in an environment where they can select their clients and the clients are free to take or leave the service according to their desire. One of many examples of this type of organization is the *private college*. And some service organizations operate in an environment where they *cannot* select the clients they are to serve and the clients *must* accept the service. One of several examples of this type of organization is the *public school.*

The significance of the relationship with clients is implied in the label of "domesticated organization" which is given to organizations like the school which cannot select clients and where the client must accept the service. The label of domesticated organization is used to indicate that this class of organization is protected and cared for in a fashion similar to that of a domesticated animal. They are not compelled to attend to all of the ordinary and usual needs of an organization. For example, they do not compete with other organizations for clients; in fact, a steady flow of clients is assured. There is no struggle for survival for this type of organization—existence is guaranteed. Though this type of organization does compete in a restricted area for funds, funds are not closely tied to quality of performance. These organizations are domesticated in the sense that they are protected by the society they serve. The society sees the protection of these domesticated organizations as necessary to the maintenance of the social

system and creates laws over and above those applying to organized action in general to care for these organizations.

The consequence of domesticating organizations, as far as organizational change is concerned, is to restrict the need for, and interest in, change because the environment of the domesticated organization in many important respects is more stable than it is in other types of organizations. When important elements of the environment are stable, as you know, the necessity for change is reduced.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the domestication of public schools is a hinderance to change along with the lack of a change agent and a weak knowledge base about educational innovation.

The Impact of Research Findings on Innovation Adoption

Now let us return to the problems of the school superintendent as a change agent and ask the question of what guide lines are suggested for his action by educational research. What does research about the adoption of educational innovations tell the school administrator?

Research on the spread of educational innovations has several characteristics which set it apart from many other streams of diffusion research. One distinctive feature is that a vast amount of work has been done. It seems fair to say that the diffusion literature is as sophisticated and as well developed as any other area of scientific study to which educators have given their attention. Further, the study of the spread of educational practices bears the mark of one man. The late Paul Mort and his students seemed almost to have cornered the market on studies of the diffusion of educational innovations. This last feature has, however, apparently permitted a third and very important characteristic of such studies: an implicit asumption that characteristics of chief school officials are unimportant in explaining rates of adoption of innovations.

Mort and his students have displayed considerable ingenuity in the isolation of variables—usually relating to the economic base of the school district, ranging from expenditure per pupil to teachers' salaries—and in fitting the variables into accounting schemes.

A conclusion based on over 100 studies done in what I choose to call the Mort tradition is this—"If but one question can be asked, on the basis of which a prediction of rate of adoption of educational innovations is to be made, the question is: 'How much is spent per child?' " Said another way, school systems that are first to adopt educational innovation spend the most money per child and those last to adopt educational innovations spend the least amount per child.

Assuming some causes and effect relationship to be at work here, what does this finding, which comes out of a vast amount of research effort, suggest to the school superintendent? I believe that it suggests a clear line of action. If a school administrator wants his district to be

on the so called leading edge in the development of public schools, his efforts above all else should be directed toward securing for his district as much money as possible and as few students as possible. I am sure this is well understood for we can all cite examples showing that this is exactly what some school districts attempt to do.

I think it is indeed fortunate, however, that this finding of the relationship between money spent per child and rates of adoption of educational innovations is being challenged by data which are now emerging.

In a recent study of the adoption of such educational practices as team teaching, modern math, foreign language instruction in the elementary grades, programmed instruction, ungraded primary classes, and accelerated programs in high schools among school systems in a county in western Pennsylvania, it was found that amount of money spent per child had a negative, insignificant correlation. That is, amount of money spent per child had no predictive power in relation to the rate of adoption of these innovations.

This is not a single finding in one county. The general finding was replicated in two ways. First, another research project was undertaken in the state of West Virginia and again it was found that the rate of adoption of these innovations was not significantly related to expenditure per child. And second, even though the expenditure level per child is considerably lower in West Virginia than it is in western Pennsylvania, there was found to be no material differences in the rates of adoptions of these innovations between these two regions of the country.

To my way of thinking, these rather recent findings which indicate no significant relationship between rate of adoption of educational innovations and expenditure per child, are indeed happy ones. They should be popular with school administrators because, for one thing, they break away from a mechanistic explanation and show the school administrator as something other than a victim of his local budget.

These findings coupled with others, which I will not bother to recite, for they are well covered in Everett Rogers' paper, give very clear evidence of the important role of school superintendents in the process of adopting educational innovations, and in general of the centrality of human rather than monetary aspects in the adoption process.